DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 096 FL 021 561

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Brecht, Richard D.; Robinson, Jennifer L. |
| TITLE | Qualitative Analysis of Second Language Acquisition in Study Abroad: The ACTR/NFLC Project. NFLC Occasional Papers. |
| INSTITUTION | Johns Hopkins Univ., Washington, DC. National Foreign Language Center. |
| PUB DATE | 93 |
| NOTE | 28p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | NFLC, Johns Hopkins University, 1619 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036 ($5 prepaid). |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Research/Technical (143) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Achievement Gains; Case Studies; College Students; Data Collection; Ethnography; Higher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Interviews; Journal Writing; *Language Skills; *Learning Processes; Listening Skills; Reading Skills; *Russian; Second Language Learning; *Second Languages; Sex Differences; Skill Development; Speech Skills; Student Characteristics; *Study Abroad; Tape Recordings |
| IDENTIFIERS | American Council of Teachers of Russian; National Foreign Language Center |

ABSTRACT

A study undertaken by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) and National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) is described. The project was designed to examine the process and results of language study abroad. The first phase of the project was a statistical analysis of the relationship between student characteristics (demographic and educational) and pre-program and post-program assessments of students' speaking, listening, and reading abilities. Subjects were 658 students of Russian participating in a semester abroad. The second phase was an ethnographic study of student language-learning behaviors and experiences in the target country, documented by self-report diaries, observations, interviews, and recordings. The present report focuses on the methodology and results of the second phase. It chronicles the data collection process (setting, participants, instruments, and data collected), and summarizes the coding, analysis, and insights gained from student calendar diaries and narrative data. Gender-related differences are discussed briefly. Additional analyses, drawn from audio- and video-recorded data and case studies, are also described briefly. Implications of the findings for second language acquisition research are analyzed. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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# *Qualitative Analysis of Second Language Acquisition in Study Abroad: The ACTR/NFLC Project*

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# *Qualitative Analysis of Second Language Acquisition in Study Abroad: The ACTR/NFLC Project*

*Richard D. Brecht and Jennifer L. Robinson*

Research on second language acquisition (SLA) is far from an adequate characterization of the complex, three-dimensional reality of foreign language learning.[1] In-depth investigation of language learning in the study-abroad environment is particularly useful in this regard, as only the in-country immersion experience emulates, to the extent possible with adult learners, the natural acquisition process and the rich environment characteristic of the first language experience. During study abroad, learners are required for the most part to manage and monitor input and their own intake and output in a setting rich in linguistic and cultural data. It is precisely in the study of such complex processes as SLA during study abroad that a qualitative approach is most appropriate and effective.

Variously referred to as nonquantified, interpretive, ethnographic, or sociolinguistic microanalysis, to paraphrase Erickson (1991), qualitative research methods are gaining a place in mainstream research on education, and more recently in the emerging field of SLA. Yet despite the growing acceptance of such approaches, remarkably few studies of this sort have been directed at the second language–learning process, particularly in the context of in-country study.[2] Perhaps the dearth of this kind of research can be explained by the inherent complexity both of the methodology and of SLA itself. Nevertheless, as we shall see, there is much to be gained from an increased investment in qualitative studies of SLA. Ferguson and Huebner (1989) admit that while ethnographic methodologies "carry with them the serious danger of disintegrating into utter chaos without careful articulation of the questions asked and types of knowledge produced," the consequences of not employing such methodologies "would be to reduce the richness of the field . . . and that, in our view, would be even worse" (p. 7).

Over the past three years the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) and the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) have been collaborating on a major project: "Language Learning during Study Abroad: The Case of Russian." With additional funding support from the U.S. Department of Education and the Ford Foundation, a team of researchers has been collecting and analyzing an unprecedented range of data providing a broadly cross-sectional view of the process and results of language study in-country.[3]

The overall project is divided into two phases. Phase I consists of a statistical analysis of the relationship between student characteristics (demographic and educational) and preprogram and postprogram assessments of speaking, listening, and reading abilities. Phase II is an ethnographic study of the in-country language-learning process, documented by self-report diaries, observations, interviews, and recordings.

Analyses of the data in Phase I of the project, based on 658 students of Russian participating in ACTR's Academic Semester Abroad Program, enabled the drawing of statistically valid predictors of language gains (after four months of immersion).[4] Among the many results of this study, three significant "predictors" of "gain" emerged: previous study of another foreign language, grammar/reading ability, and gender.[5] As in all such statistical analyses, these correlations draw attention to significant issues, which then demand explanation. The first factor points to the possible existence of learning behavior born of experience in language learning; the second to learning styles and management; and the last to sociological factors.

Accordingly, Phase II of the project, an elaborate ethnographic study of student language-learning behaviors and experiences in-country, was undertaken. Time/place maps, in which students indicated the activities they engaged in, with whom, for how long, and in which language, were used to document student behaviors. Second, in order to gain detailed, firsthand accounts of students' actual experiences in learning Russian in-country, student self-report journals and fieldworker observations, interviews, and recordings were gathered. (A description of these instruments is given below in Section 1.3.)

The time/place data in Phase II, presented in number of hours, suggested a correlation between language gains and in-country behavior. These data, together with the previously mentioned predictors of gain, sharpened the focus of the qualitative analysis, which had two purposes: (1) to provide some explanation of the significant statistical correlations arrived at in Phase I, and (2) to offer a preliminary characterization of the language-learning experience based on actual student accounts.

The ACTR/NFLC project constitutes a comprehensive study of language learning in the study-abroad environment, employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments and methods. By describing the range of instruments and the analytic methodology employed in Phase II of the project, we hope to demonstrate concretely the critical value of qualitative methodology to SLA research. We begin with a description of the setting, participants, instruments, and data collected in Phase II of the project (Section 1). Next we turn to an exploration of the calendar diaries (Section 2), the narrative data (Section 3), and additional analyses (Section 4).

## 1. DATA COLLECTION

### *1.1. Setting*

The students in this investigation participated in ACTR's semester-long language study-abroad programs in Moscow and St. Petersburg.[6] These programs were

part of each institute's "Russian for foreigners" program (administered and staffed by in-country personnel). The curricula of these programs included core courses in grammar, phonetics, and conversation and one to two additional courses such as a country survey or a course in literature or the press. On average, students attended twenty hours of class weekly. Except for excursions to historical and cultural places of interest and short in-country trips, the program structured little of the students' out-of-class time.

Ten to twenty students were placed at participating institutes. Each group was under the supervision of a resident director, a young American faculty member who lived in the dorm with the students and was responsible for monitoring their academic progress as well as assisting in the practical matters of living.

### *1.2. Participants*

The participants were American college students of the Russian language (or some related field) selected on a competitive basis to participate in an ACTR academic semester–abroad program. Some were in their third or fourth year of undergraduate study; others were graduate students; and still others were in transition from undergraduate to graduate study. Most students had taken two to four years of formal college Russian and had pre–Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) scores from 0 to 2 (most falling in the 0 to 1+ range).

### *1.3. Instruments*

Self-report, observation, and interview modes of data collection were employed to gather information on student behavior and experiences. The self-report instruments used were calendar diaries, narrative and oral journals, and notebooks.

— *Calendar diaries (CDs).* CDs consisted of blank daily calendars, listing the hours of a single day from two o'clock in the afternoon (when classes ended) until one o'clock in the morning (at which time most students presumably would have retired). For each hour or portion thereof, students recorded (1) what they did, (2) where they were, (3) whom they were with, and (4) what language they used.

— *Narrative and oral journals (NJs/OJs).* Students were asked to spend some time writing about (NJ) or describing on audiotape (OJ), in English, three significant experiences using their Russian language skills, addressing any of a range of topics. Specifically, they were to describe the language used, their relationships with native Russian speakers (to the extent that this affected their language learning), communication breakdowns, and other factors that they felt had an impact on their language acquisition.

— *Notebooks (NBs).* Several students were solicited to keep a detailed record of their learning over the entire semester, with particular emphasis on the connection between academic classwork and the informal learning that took place out of class with native-speaker friends.

In addition to these self-report instruments, a variety of observational techniques

were utilized over the course of the project. Four graduate student research assistants spent time in Russia conducting ethnographic observations and interviews, taping students, and coordinating on-site collection of the self-report data. Their efforts resulted in the following kinds of data:

— *Fieldnotes (FNs).* Fieldworkers were instructed to keep two sets of fieldnotes: temporary and expanded. Temporary fieldnotes were rough, short notes taken on the scene and generally intelligible only to the fieldworker who wrote them. These notes assisted the researcher in recalling key events (or, in the language-learning context, perhaps the key words or phrases of an incident) in order to write an expanded, full description of the observed events. Ideally, this expanded version of the fieldnotes was written as soon as possible after leaving the field. The researcher's reactions to these events were either noted explicitly in the text or written in a separate journal (which we referred to as an FJ).

— *Fieldwork journals (FJs).* In the FJ the researcher recorded the process of conducting fieldwork, presenting interpretations, insights, difficulties, and questions encountered in the field.

— *Interviews (INs).* The fieldworkers interviewed study participants over the course of the semester in order to gather various types of information on the language acquisition process. In some interviews the researchers elicited participants' general impressions of learning Russian. During others the fieldworkers asked subjects to reflect specifically on either entries in the self-report data or an event the fieldworker had observed.

— *Audiotapes (AT) and videotapes (VT).* Whenever possible, the fieldworkers taped, with either audio or video equipment, students interacting in the classroom as well as outside of the enclaved living and studying environment, especially in Russians' homes. In addition, some of the interviews conducted by the fieldworkers with study participants were audiotaped.

### *1.4. Timetable and Quantity of Data Collected*

Data were collected over five semesters (from fall 1989 to summer 1991) from students at six different institutes including Lenin Pedagogical, Moscow Steel and Alloys, Moscow Energy, Plekhanov, Pushkin, and Herzen. Table 1 summarizes the data collected for Phase II of the project.

In fall 1989 a graduate research assistant with a background in Russian and SLA conducted a pilot study for the project, observing and interviewing students. This researcher conducted a similar study in fall 1990.

In spring 1990 this first researcher and two additional research assistants gathered student data and conducted fieldwork. In order to get a fair sample of student activities throughout the semester, three rounds of CDs and NJs/OJs were collected (early in, midway through, and late in the semester). Students were asked to complete CDs every day for an entire week per round. They made entries in either NJs or OJs three times a week per round. In order to reduce the skew of a self-selected and therefore more highly motivated set of learners, each student was paid $10—a significant amount of money for a student living in

Russian society at the time—for one week's worth of participation in filling out CDs or NJs/OJs.

The result was 215 individual CDs. Ninety-two students completed CDs for all three rounds. A total of seventy-one NJs were gathered from thirty-one students. Just under half of these students (fourteen) kept NJs for all three rounds. In total, thirty OJs were provided by fourteen students; half of those kept OJs for all three rounds. Two students alternated between NJs and OJs.

While the first three fieldworkers acted as nonparticipant observers (in the sense that they were not enrolled in the institute's program), in spring 1991 the fourth research assistant (a coauthor of the present paper) was a participant observer in the program at Moscow Steel and Alloys Institute. As the first participant observer, she was assigned a specific area of concentration: the in- and out-of-class relationship. This graduate student conducted classroom observations in the courses she was taking and interviewed fellow program participants. She also kept her own language learning diary (LD)—rather like an extensive NB. Audiotapes (mostly of the classroom) and videotapes (out-of-class) were also recorded. Two rounds of CDs—at the beginning and in the middle of the semester—were collected from this institute's students. Seven students were asked to keep NBs; four managed to complete this task, for which they were paid $50.

Finally, CDs and NJs were collected during summer 1991 in order to

**Table 1: Phase II Data Collection**

| Semester | Institute | Text Source | Data Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fall 1989 | Lenin | 1 fieldworker | fieldnotes |
| Spring 1990 | Lenin, Steel, Energy, Plekhanov, Pushkin, and Herzen | 92 students | 215 calendar diaries |
| | | 31 students | 71 narrative journals (14 all 3 rounds) |
| | | 14 students | 30 oral journals (7 all 3 rounds) |
| | | 3 fieldworkers | fieldnotes audio- and videotapes |
| Fall 1990 | Lenin | 1 fieldworker | fieldnotes audio- and videotapes |
| Spring 1991 | Steel | 13 students | 24 calendar diaries (13 both rounds) |
| | | 7 students | 7 notebooks |
| | | 1 student | 1 language diary |
| | | 1 fieldworker | fieldnotes audio- and videotapes |
| Summer 1991 | Herzen | 5 students | 5 calendar diaries 5 narrative journals |

determine if behavior patterns and/or experiences in the two-month immersion program differed from those in the four-month semester-long program.

These various modes of data present different vantage points on the language-learning process in-country. The self-report data provide firsthand accounts from the students' perspective. Because they had strong ability in the language, the first three research assistants were able to offer an outside, "objective" assessment of the students' ability in and use of Russian. The data of the fourth research assistant, a full-fledged student in the language program, added the view of both participant and observer. Finally, the audio- and videotapes are unfiltered accounts of actual encounters between students and native speakers.

## 2. CALENDAR DIARIES

### *2.1. Coding and Analysis*

In order not to impose a predetermined view of student behavior upon the data collected, participants were asked to identify what they did during after-class hours, who was present, where they were, how long the activity they were involved in lasted, and which language they were using.

The CDs returned contained a fairly wide range of specificity of recorded activities on the part of the students. Accordingly, the decision was made to code the CDs at the level of specificity provided by the students. Thus, in spring 1990, for example, the 92 students recorded 11,354 "events" in 215 one-week diaries, which were electronically coded in the following categories: (1) event name (e.g., telephoning, shopping, meeting friends—108 different events were named by the students); (2) place (e.g., dorm, residence, theater); (3) language (English, Russian, mostly English with a little Russian, mostly Russian with a little English, other, none); (4) persons (roommate, American, Soviet friend, Soviet stranger, other; one, two, or more); and finally (5) duration (time in minutes).

Since one of the primary goals of the CD component of the project was to characterize the amount of time each student spent in which activities associating with which people and speaking which language, the calculation of duration received a great deal of attention. The coding was done by graduate assistants who had experience in the same in-country programs as the study participants. On the basis of their direct knowledge, these coders were then able to interpolate duration where the student entries were vague (e.g., the duration of metro transportation between different points in Moscow, waits in lines for shopping, or making international telephone calls at the central telegraph facility). The coders also provided reliability notes on students' time estimates (as well as on the other categorizations).

All initial tabulations of time spent were carried out at the event level, since the students' reports were given at this level. However, since the students identified many different events and since some CDs were very detailed and others quite broad, the events had to be grouped in different ways in order to make analysis possible on a comparable and relevant record of behavior. For one analysis, the grouping took the form of coding the events coded into eleven general "situations," corresponding to the type of answer one might give when

asked, for example, "What did you do yesterday evening?" (See Table 2 for a description of these situations.)

The prototypical "situation" is defined as a significant and identifiable

**Table 2: Eleven Situations Used for Analyzing the Calendar Diaries**

| Situation | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. DINING OUT | Public dining as opposed to eating in Russians' homes or in the dorm or cafeteria.<br>*Typical events include:* transportation, searching, waiting (in line), eating. |
| 2. ON THE TOWN | An evening or night out (usually involving dressing up for social activity) whose goal is not solely dining out but a mixture of activities, one of which might be eating somewhere (embassy visits are included in this situation).<br>*Typical events include:* transportation, searching, waiting, eating, walking, meeting friends, drinking, dancing. |
| 3. PARTY | A group of young people gathered to celebrate something.<br>*Typical events include:* talking, drinking, singing. |
| 4. HANGING OUT | At the dorm or institute (class location).<br>*Typical events include:* visiting, eating, watching TV, rersonal (bathe, sick, letter writing). |
| 5. DAY OUTING | Local activity, mostly outside, during the day (going on a picnic, to the zoo).<br>*Typical events include:* meeting friends, walking, eating. |
| 6. RESIDENCE VISITING | Visiting a residence (mostly those of Russians), the visit being the purpose of going out; the location of the visit might be a Russian's home or another institute or dorm.<br>*Typical events include:* transportation, talking, eating, watching TV. |
| 7. FUNCTIONAL ACT | Activities necessary to conduct one's nonacademic life, including going to the Telegraf, changing money, doing laundry (mostly identified by "where?")<br>*Typical events include:* shopping, telephoning, waiting. |
| 8. CULTURAL ACTIVITY | Goal of outing includes sports and movies, circus (identified by location).<br>*Typical events include:* transportation, buying tickets, meeting friends. |
| 9. EXERCISE | Identified by location, e.g., runr:ng taking place on street.<br>*Typical events include:* meeting friends, transportation. |
| 10. TRAVELING | Out-of-town and all other contained situations that are not distinguished. |
| 11. ACADEMIC | Activities associated with academic program.<br>*Typical events include:* touring (sponsored excursion), homework, research. |

activity, lasting some time and consisting of a number of "events." Each situation, then, consists of events, which in turn can be broken down further into "speech acts," containing specific "topics."[7] Again, all determination of who, where, when, how long, and what language were based first on the event level and only then "summarized" by situation.

In defining each situation, we adopted the following conventions:

— Situations cannot be contained in other situations (and so the names of events cannot coincide with those of situations).
— The list of situations is finite: eleven.
— Situations are made up of one or more events. These events can represent a prolonged general activity or one of a series of activities, depending upon the specification of the CD. For example, "residence visiting" may consist entirely of a minimally specified event like visiting, or it may be broken down into drinking, eating, watching TV, and so on. Where a situation contains only one event, the time duration of both will coincide, but the event may add specificity to the situation. For example, "functional act" may contain only the macroevent telephoning, or it may be composed of transport, waiting, conversation, telephoning, and transport.
— In complex circumstances, two situations may occur in direct sequence. For example, if the first event is a movie followed by a series of unrelated other activities, then the first event is identified as "cultural activity," and the second part is labeled "day outing" or "on the town." If, however, the main goal of the student is precisely the movie, and a café stop, for example, follows on the way home, this latter event is included in the single "cultural activity" situation.

Where the reporting was detailed, the event times were summed to arrive at the situation duration time. Where it was very vague, the events were essentially equated with the situation.[8] In any instance, all time durations were calculated at the event level and then totaled and reported at the situation level. By grouping and analyzing behavior in this manner, the unevenness of the reporting was leveled out. These gross situations were distinguished for all students and characterized the general communication and cultural activities of students in-country.

### 2.2. *Preliminary Insights*

The information provided by the CDs represents the amount of time spent in various situations with a variety of people speaking Russian or another language. The types of analyses made possible by these kinds of data include, for instance, a calculation of the amount of time spent in various situations, by rounds and by gender (Figures 1 and 2). We can see in Figure 1, for example, that the largest percentage of time was spent by students "hanging out" through all three rounds of the CDs. Figure 2 offers a comparison of the amount of time male and female students spent in each situation. (More commentary will be made on this figure below in Section 3.2.2.)

Figure 1
Time in Situations by Round

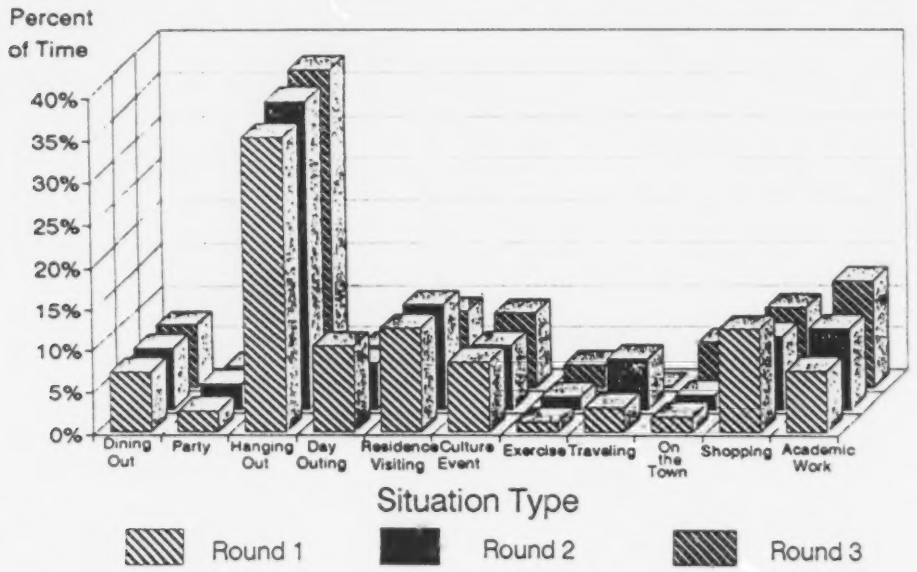
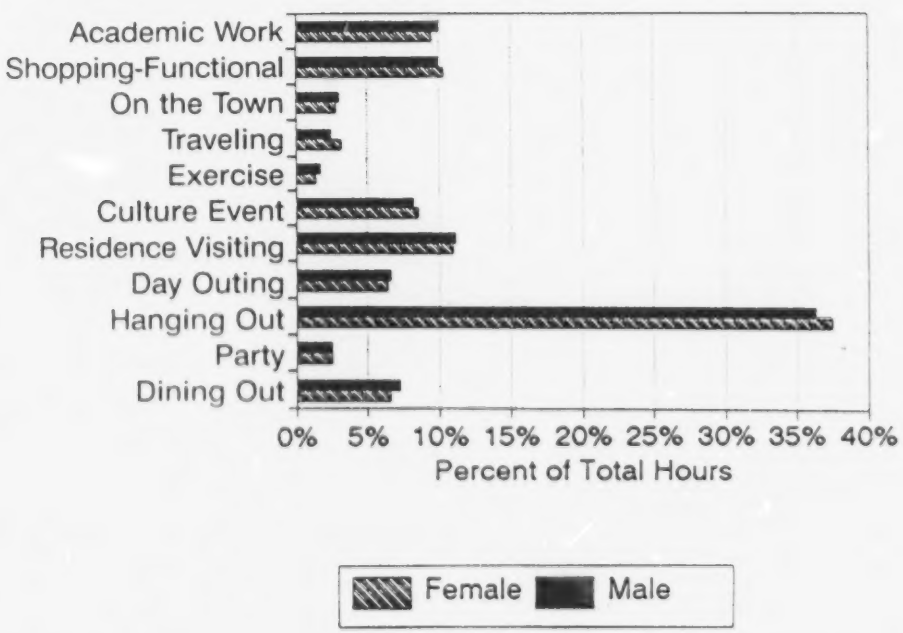



Figure 2
Time in Situations by Gender



By integrating these data with the original ACTR quantified database containing preprogram student characteristics as well as language skill "gains," two preliminary trends were apparent. First, students with initial higher-level skills spoke more "Russian only" than students with lower-level language skills. Second, students at the same level of speaking competency who spoke more "Russian only" gained more in language competence than students who used more English. While more data are required to validate these conclusions statistically, these are among the first empirical data that confirm the widely held opinion that more use creates more competence. These data suggest that the more Russian one has, the more one uses—and, in turn, the more one uses, the more one gains. These findings may be interpreted as indirect evidence that the more language competency one has before immersion, the more one gains in-country. This is, to our knowledge, among the first concrete data ever offered that answer the question, At what level of language competency should students go abroad?

Along these same lines, it is very revealing to analyze the amount of time spent speaking "Russian only" among students who went from a preprogram level of 1 to 1+ or 2. Compared with the "nongainers" (students who scored a 1 on the OPI both before and after the program), the 1-to-1+ gainers spent over 25 percent more time speaking Russian only, while the 1-to-2 gainers spent over 45 percent more time speaking Russian only. These data clearly indicate the rewards of an aggressive attitude toward using the language, even at the relatively low level of 1. Also, the CD data show that the high gainers (1 to 2) spent over 40 percent more time with a single Russian friend than did the nongainers—again suggesting a type of behavior that is beneficial to language learning. Such results are intuitively satisfying to scholars and teachers knowledgeable about SLA during study abroad, and they become convincing to policymakers and administrators because they provide empirical evidence for assertions traditionally based on informed intuition.

While in general the CDs were found to be an effective instrument for gathering behavioral data on the study-abroad experience, as of yet the clustering into situations has revealed only that men and women participate generally in the same activities in-country (see Figure 2). Other clusterings of events are being tested, for example, by homogeneous "activity" (like dining, conversing, or playing sports). In addition, it may also be possible to classify the activities by the coded categories themselves, like interlocutor, type, and number, to develop what might be tentatively called a taxonomy of "degrees of intimacy": activities with a close Russian friend, with Russian friends, with mixed Russian and American friends, with Russian service people, and so on. This approach to the analysis of time/place data assumes that various degrees of intimacy demand different kinds of language (e.g., register, style, and topics). This kind of grouping of events is possible with the current data set and will be discussed in subsequent writings; but to confirm this assertion, any future data collection with such instruments should probably include directions to students to specify as closely as possible the relationship of the person with whom they are engaged in a particular activity.

## 3. NARRATIVE DATA

### *3.1. Coding and Analysis*

Whether the instrument is self-report (NJs/OJs, NBs), participant or nonparticipant observation (FNs, FJs), or interviews (INs), the data to be processed and analyzed can result in an extended body of narrative text. While one cannot hope to generalize from these individual narratives with the same confidence possible in the quantitative paradigm, the heuristic value of such narrative reports is extremely high. Only through a body of such subjective impressions and observations can the basis for delineating the scope of such a complicated problem as SLA in the immersion environment be attempted. The crux of the researcher's task in narrative analysis is to glean insights from the often voluminous data in the most effective way.

#### *3.1.1. Coding*

Toward this end, a first attempt was made to code the text in such a way that would enhance the insights gained as well as enable the immediate recall and automatic insertion of student and fieldworker voices in subsequent descriptions of any aspect of the overall project. However, in order not to impose a ready-made set of assumptions or even a theoretical framework on this large bank of data, the first step was to label the text according to immediately recognizable surface phenomena. Each coder—in this case, graduate students experienced in study abroad in Russia—was given one or two of the categories listed below to mark in the text and was instructed not to interpret, or extrapolate from, the original text. The following seven categories, based on initial debriefings with the fieldworkers and readings of the data, were chosen for the first round of text coding and processing. The rationale for each category is given below, although an overriding consideration was the objective recognizability of the category by any coder.

1. *Situation description.* Each text was marked to indicate which of the eleven situations (used in coding the CDs) was referred to in the narrative. The aim here was to use the words of the students and fieldworkers to produce a complete characterization of each situation and its contained events, speech acts, and topics.

The next three categories concern sociolinguistic and sociological factors that can be understood to play a role in SLA in the study-abroad environment.

2. *Attitudes, affect, and behavior of others.* We hypothesized that the quality of input was crucial to the learning process in study abroad. Accordingly, we were interested in the kinds and roles of caretakers (e.g., teachers, friends, strangers, intimates) encountered by students in-country.

3. *Breakdowns, failures, misunderstandings.* Under this category we sought information about communication strategies, deficiencies in cultural knowledge, and discourse skills. In contrast to the preceding category, which focused on the behavior of others, here the charge was to note the students' feelings about themselves, in particular their sense of failure. We theorized that these factors

played an important part in how students managed the often overwhelming input of the immersion environment.

4. *Gender-related incidents.* The preliminary quantitative data analyses indicated that, controlling for a broad range of variables, gender was a strong factor in predicting gains in oral proficiency. Thus, we targeted this theme to determine the nature and extent of the role of gender in SLA during study abroad.

The remaining categories concerned the cognitive and psycholinguistic aspects of SLA. While the subject of cognitive strategies has received much attention in recent years, more attention needs to be paid to these strategies outside of the classroom context—that is, in informal situations encountered during study abroad.[9] Accordingly, the following themes were selected in order to provide some baseline data on strategy use in-country:

5. *Talk about language.* We hypothesized that insight into the cognitive strategies employed by learners in-country could be gained from student comments about the language itself, including observations about use and learning. (Common, and often very dramatic, examples of "episodic" learning were included in this category as well, as illustrated below.)

6. *Metacognitive strategies.* Here we sought instances in which students described language learning in terms of planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation—that is, information on how students consciously approached learning the language.

7. *Anything related to classrooms.* Our final focus was the role of the formal academic component in SLA. An in-depth analysis of the study-abroad experience can potentially shed some light on the relationship between formal and informal learning environments. The contrast between these two modes is nowhere more clearly revealed than in student remarks (and observations) related to classroom learning in-country.

### *3.1.2. Analysis*

The coding of the texts, according to the system described above, was only the first step. Our goal was to reveal, in the students' own words, the language-learning process as it unfolded in the immersion environment. Multiple close readings have begun to reveal what might be called the "terms of reference" for SLA during study abroad. For example, the overall characterization of this phenomenon can be summarized by reference to three general qualities—it is rich, real, and relevant. Each quality has both positive and negative consequences for the learner in-country.

By "rich" we mean that the input is great—both in terms of the amount and kinds of linguistic and cultural information, and in terms of the modes of input, which are able to accommodate all kinds of learners with all kinds of learning styles. However, the negative side of this situation is obvious, raising questions about the minimal threshold of language ability permitting SLA, about the cultivation and management of "caretakers," about the use of metacognitive, cognitive, socioaffective, and particularly communication strategies, all of which structure input, enable intake, and monitor output.

If the effectiveness of long-term memory, and thus learning, is enhanced both by repetition and by intensity, then the "richness" of study abroad directly reenforces the former, while the latter finds its correspondence in the very "real" quality of living in the target culture. The narratives are rife with examples of "episodic" learning, whereby words, phrases, and grammar devices are all indelibly inscribed in memory by neural networks bound by time and experience:

> When it became clear no other guests would arrive, Marina was very unhappy and said, "Ia prosto obidena" [sic] [I'm simply hurt]—Bang! I just acquired the word for "insulted," which I've learned repeatedly but always forget. That was the first time anyone's ever used the word with me and actually *been* insulted at the same time. (Jane, NJ1, 2/25/90)

The down side of the reality of combining learning with living is found in the students' constant references to weariness, to disenchantment with the culture, to the cycles of reinforcing highs and depressing lows in using and learning Russian, to adjustments to a variety of caretaker temperaments and attitudes toward non-native Russian.

Finally, the "relative" aspect of study abroad has to do with the fact that, unlike the classroom situation, where a teacher can all but guarantee that a certain amount of learning will take place over the course of a semester among the majority of the students, in study abroad the success of each student is much more dependent upon a range of individual qualities such as learning style preferences, personality, and motivation. For example, above we indicated that the more one spoke the language, the more one learned. The motivation to speak, in turn, is influenced by a range of social and affective factors, which on the basis of the students' narratives can be viewed as the students' view of themselves, their view of others, and their view of others' opinion of them. Under these rubrics lie a whole range of factors affecting the intensity of students' interactivity, including comfort levels, cultural and/or gender-based conflicts, and feelings of being childlike or unintelligent. Moreover, the "relative" nature of learning in-country derives from the radical shift to self-managed learning (from the teacher-managed learning experienced by most students in Russian classrooms at home).[10] As long as this ability is not attended to in the preparation of students for study abroad, the variation in success will depend largely on the individual learner.

Before leaving this very superficial sampling of the insights provided by such data for a broader elaboration of two topics, some remarks concerning the coding approach adopted here are in order. First, it became clear in analyzing the data that passages marked for one or another of the categories listed above were difficult to appreciate outside of their entire context. Remarks on gender, for instance, could truly be assessed only against the background of all the entries made by that particular individual. Thus, the coding served as a rough indicator whereby insights concerning gender could be found, but a broad reading of the passage, well beyond the limits of the marked text, was essential for full appreciation of the commentary.

Second, while some of the categories chosen were specific enough to focus attention upon certain passages, others proved to be either too broad or too simplistic. For example, while the category "talk about language" was useful for

analyzing NJs and OJs, it was particularly problematic in coding the INs and NBs, for the main focus of all those data was language. The result was that practically all of the IN and NB narrative could have been coded in this category. On the other hand, the categories of "communication breakdowns" and "attitudes, affect . . ." were intended to capture, respectively, the texture of two sorts of instances: those in which students had internal linguistic breakdowns, and those in which communication breakdowns stemmed from the conduct of others. Upon examination of these incidents, however, it became apparent that often these breakdowns resulted from a combination of both phenomena—that is, a native speaker's negative remark about a student's language skills resulted in the student feeling flustered or disheartened, which in turn contributed to an internal linguistic breakdown.

Such reflections upon our coding, however, are not intended to be discouraging with regard to the insights that such data can produce. Next, we shall discuss two topics illustrating the ability of the narrative data to present a rich and more dynamic picture of SLA during study abroad than we have had previously.

### *3.2. Illustrative Topics*

The focus of this section is to illustrate the type of information narrative data can generate about SLA. Having admitted some of the difficulties encountered in coding, for the sake of this discussion we nevertheless choose to use the narrative data coded in two categories that are relatively straightforward: (1) "anything related to classrooms" and (2) "gender-related incidents." Our purpose here is to exemplify the methodology rather than to present the results of the narrative analyses. Hence, we offer just a small sampling of the data.

#### *3.2.1. Classrooms*

Studying a language as a primarily abstract, academic subject in a domestic classroom differs greatly from studying that language in-country. While learning is a subjective experience in any context, an effect of being in-country is to increase the relevance of a particular individual's goals, motivation, and learning style to the acquisition process. While a teacher might reasonably expect to bring most students in a classroom to a particular level of skill attainment, the number of variables influencing learning in-country is so large that it is much less reasonable to expect any homogeneity with regard to the amount or kind of learning taking place among students abroad.

Classroom learning in-country seemed to provoke a range of student reactions. Specifically, we shall present three basic ways in which students described the role of classes—or, more specifically, the interface between formal instruction and the out-of-class general learning taking place in-country. (In illustrating this wide divergence of student attitudes and approaches toward classes, we shall also demonstrate how the various data sources in this study can be interwoven to provide insight on the same phenomenon from different points of view.)

Some students attributed a strong role to classes, asserting that classes played an important if not essential part in managing their out-of-class learning. For example, Reginald wrote in his NB at the end of the semester:

> The things I learned in class focused me, gave me a goal to achieve outside of class. While speaking to friends in Russian I would try and use what I learned in class. . . . Class instruction in a sense was a computer program which coded and stored vital information in my memory banks. Without class instruction this information would not have been program[med] properly. (NB, 5/25/91)

For Reginald, then, classes played a large role in structuring learning outside the classroom.

Reginald's assertion was verified by incidents in the fieldnotes. Earlier in the semester the fieldworker observed an instance of Reginald employing the preposition *vozle* (in front of), which had just been taught in class:

> Upon returning from lunch, I heard Reginald talking to a staff member at our institute and they were arranging a place to meet after class.
>
> REGINALD: We can meet, uh, in front of this building? [My mozhem vstretit', uh, *vozle* etogo zdaniia?]
>
> IVAN: [*continues talking, yes, acknowledges he understood Reginald*]
>
> REGINALD: There [*pointing to the front door from the window*]? In front of this building? [Tam, *vozle* etogo zdaniia?]
>
> IVAN: Yes, by the entrance over there [*pointing to the same door from the window*]. [Da, pri vkhoda, vot tam.]
>
> So, Reginald used something we had just studied before in class. (FN, 2/18/91)

The fieldworker attended the same class as Reginald, and thus was already familiar with the content presented in class. In her observation of this brief dialogue between classes, the fieldworker captured an incident supporting Reginald's overall assessment of the role of classes in his learning of Russian.

Still another perspective was gained when the fieldworker interviewed Reginald regarding the above incident. She wrote in her FN:

> I told him I had noted he used *vozle* [in front of] outside class after we'd just been studying it. He laughed and said that he had never heard of *vozle* before and now was having fun using it. He said he remembered using *vozle* the time I noticed and one other time. (FN, 2/24/91)

Thus, the fieldwork confirmed Reginald's perception—as indicated in his NB—that classes helped to structure his out-of-class learning.

While Reginald and other students attributed a crucial role to classes in out-of-class learning, this was by no means the prevailing opinion. Some other students felt that language learning in-country was essentially a collection of contexts containing varied language input. The classroom, characterized by the modified "standard" Russian of native-speaker teachers—commonly referred to as "teacher talk"—was a qualitatively different context, providing its own unique set of language data. Exposure to multiple environments allowed learners to process the same linguistic information several times. For instance, during an interview in which the fieldworker asked for elaboration on a remark on the in-

and out-of-class relationship in her NJ, Jane described the "recognition phenomenon":

> JANE: Well, in class we do a lot of repetition of things, right? Here, first I'd be saying things, and then I'd realize that I'd done it. It was like a recognition phenomena [sic]: I can't remember where I'd got it, but I know I heard it somewhere. A lot of times I figure a word out, then realize I'd already learned it in class.
>
> FIELDWORKER: Can you think of any examples?
>
> JANE: It happened with the word *mestnyi* [local, belonging to the place]. I heard someone use it, and then figured out what it meant, and then realized I knew the word. (FN, 3/2/90)

Here we see how in processing the language, Jane was aware of having learned a word in class. However, it was not until she heard it again, in another context, that the word was brought to her consciousness. We might also note that through the interview the fieldworker was able to solicit more reflection from Jane on her original diary entry.

Still other students felt that classes contributed little to their overall acquisition of Russian. When asked during a group interview about the usefulness of classes, Louise, for example, at first responded, "Well, it's something do," then recanted: "No—you can ask questions and stuff. You can ask someone who *definitely* knows" (4/27/91). She added in a later interview:

> Some classes are good but all classes could be duplicated in the States and that's why they're worthless. I can learn the same stuff at home, but other stuff you couldn't learn at home—I mean basically the things you learn from your friends. (FN, 5/14/91)

Thus, while Louise could find some respects in which classes were beneficial, she felt that her overall progress in Russian depended to a greater extent on her encounters with friends.

Even students at the same institutes and in the same classes described the role of classes in their learning differently. Such an observation highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics of individual learner characteristics (such as goals, learning styles, and other affective variables). Furthermore, while some students asserted that the classes were of minimal value to their learning, observations and interviews revealed that valuable connections existed, which students simply failed to acknowledge in the self-report instruments. This confirms the necessity of a multiple-instrument approach to such ethnographic research, particularly when approaching a topic where preconceived notions exist.

### *3.2.2. Gender-Related Incidents*

The statistical analyses of language skill gains in-country in the current project give a clear indication of differences between men and women in listening and speaking.[11] On the basis of those results we determined that gender was an important theme in the overall study of SLA during study abroad. When we compared the CDs of men and women, the data showed that the two groups spent their free time similarly (see Figure 2), suggesting that something more

subtle was causing this difference. Thus, we posited that there was some qualitative difference between the experiences of women and men participating in these activities.

In the narrative data, women identified situations in which being female was a factor in their language learning. Four examples will be presented to illustrate some of the dynamics of gender and its effect on language practice.

In her second NJ Jessica described how she was excluded from the conversation one evening:

> We went back to the dorm where one of them lives and hung out there, talked some about Lithuania, some about college life in America, some about stipends and salaries and how Russians get by financially, and other subjects. They continued all night to speak as simply as they could, but my comprehension waned as the night wore on. The other notable thing is that for about an hour they spoke to and looked at only Harry, and talking to him later we concurred that the reason was that he is male and I am not. We both have approximately the same level of language ability and were making similar contributions to the conversation, but when anything at all intellectual was being discussed, he was very obviously considered more worthy of attention. The effect on me was to think twice about everything I said to make sure it was grammatically correct, so I suppose it was beneficial language-wise. (NJ2, 4/10/90)

Jessica felt that being a woman resulted in less conversation practice, particularly when the topic was "intellectual."

Sally experienced similar difficulties in trying to participate in a political discussion. However, when the men learned that she was an American, she suddenly became the center of attention:

> I was with Igor', and we were downtown and there was a political discussion. This was when it was really big to talk politics, it was new, and people were just starting to openly talk in the street, and there was this huge group of men discussing politics down by Pushkinskaia Ploshchad' [Pushkin Square] and we were standing there, and I said let's stop and listen, and I wanted to talk to this guy. Igor' asked him a question, so he turned around and was talking to Igor'. But he did not acknowledge my presence. And it wasn't immediately . . . he didn't know that I was an American right away. You tell by the clothes I had on, it wasn't *vidno* [evident] right away that I was an American, and I was just a girl. And he wouldn't talk to me, and I tried to interrupt, and I tried to ask questions, and he would not acknowledge my presence. And I knew that as soon as I said I was an American, he would talk to me. But I wanted to be talked to as a person, not as an American. And I finally lost my patience, because I wanted to talk to this guy so much, and he was still talking to Igor', and they were facing each other, and I was on the outside. And he said something about the U.S., and I don't remember what he said, but it was completely false. And at that point I lost it, and I said, "You're wrong! I know, I'm an American." And then I had a group of ten men around me, asking me questions, how much does a kilo of chicken cost, what do families do together on a Sunday, you know, everything. And it was so frustrating. . . . And the political discussion went by the wayside. (IN, 11/20/90)

Through Sally's narrative we can see how American women living in Russian

society may be frustrated by the complex assigned gender roles that interfere with their attempts to communicate in Russian. Because she was a woman, Sally initially was excluded from the political discussion; however, as a foreigner, she had status and was an immediate authority on things American. While Sally did get an opportunity to practice speaking, she did not have much success in returning to the original topic—politics.

Agatha's account of an evening spent speaking Russian with only women illustrates how gender might work positively in language-learning practice:

> Right after class I went with two of my instructors to the home of one of them. What an evening. I talked and talked and listened and listened—absolutely one of the best evenings I've spent and certainly of the most intensive learning situations I've been in, in Moscow. The pretext for my being invited was helping me call some of the people Russian friends in America asked me to get in touch with, since I have an absolute terror of calling strangers. Well, we were together from 2:30 P.M. to around 10:30 P.M.—when our paths separated in the metro. And only managed to telephone one of about half a dozen people! It was simply wonderful, of course we spoke only in Russian, and I got all the help and corrections I wanted, but they pretty much let me babble at will and mostly corrected me when I was really stumped or in some other way I indicated I need "guidance." It was especially wonderful because we were four females (the three of us plus the nine-or-so-year-old daughter of my hostess). We talked a lot about the Russian woman, her hardships in this society, we joked, we talked about the differences between our societies. It was a wonderful evening—I ate way too many sweets and drank so much tea I had no trouble staying up to do tomorrow's homework until 1:30 A.M.! It was just great—I hope it won't be the last time we get together. (NJ1, 3/5/90)

In contrast to Jessica's and Sally's experiences, Agatha evidently felt that she had easy entry into the conversation, could speak as much as she wanted, and got help in improving her Russian. Instead of being excluded because of her gender, Agatha may have had easier access because she was female (e.g., in the discussions of Russian women's lives).

One might have the impression, given these examples, that we are suggesting that all Russian males are poor or negative caretakers in their interactions with American women studying Russian. However, this assertion is not corroborated universally in the narrative data. For instance, Gwen described how two male acquaintances reacted differently to her errors in Russian. She had this to say about talking with one male acquaintance, Seva:

> He didn't correct my mistakes, unless I asked him the correct way to say something. But I always felt at ease asking, and he explains grammar well. We talked nonstop all night, and I felt like we were totally understanding each other! (NJ1, 3/8/90)

In the next incident in her NJ, Gwen had the opposite experience with Sajid, a second male acquaintance:

> He loves to talk to anyone who will listen, but he doesn't believe women are capable of holding their own political views. That, along with my own difficulty with the language and lack of political vocabulary, made a serious conversation impossible. If I weren't feeling so good about my Russian from

last night, I would be depressed by tonight. Sajid is constantly correcting everything I say. Even if I'm right grammatically, he tells me how to say things better, or that no Russians ever say things this way or that, etc. He thinks he's doing it to put me in my place, but what he doesn't know is that I appreciate it! Ha! (NJ1, 3/9/90)

Hence, Gwen had two different experiences with men correcting her Russian: one encouraging, the other discouraging.

Upon reading Gwen's NJ, the fieldworker conducted a follow-up interview. From this interview we learn how Gwen made sense of the two ways in which her errors were treated by male acquaintances:

GWEN: Oh, Sajid [*laughs*]. Yeah, he's like that. He speaks extra quickly just to make me not understand. But that's also part of his attitude. He doesn't care what women think in general.

FIELDWORKER: What do you mean?

GWEN: Well, he said, for example, like, "Yes, I don't care what you think, I'm a chauvinist." He just sits there and corrects my Russian. It just makes serious conversations impossible. But I do learn from it.

FIELDWORKER: In a different way than you learn from Seva?

GWEN: That's right. Seva encourages me to use my Russian. With Sajid, I pick things up, and the things he corrects, but I don't really like speaking to him. He just turns you off. (FN, 3/12/90)

According to Gwen, the way in which male caretakers modified their speech and corrected her Russian reflected their underlying views of women. (This is also an appropriate juncture at which to point out the strength of this methodology: Gwen noted some surface manifestations of gender issues in relation to her study of Russian, but it was the fieldworker who prompted her to make broader observations on the two approaches to error correction and the effects of those approaches on her language learning.)

From these examples we get some idea of how a putative disparity between the language gains of women and men might have resulted. We have seen from these few passages that American women may have fewer—and qualitatively different—opportunities to speak in a mixed-gender setting than American males. It is also apparent that while women might feel more comfortable and be given more constructive feedback on their Russian in a females-only situation,not all Russian males are negative caretakers. While these insights are based on a cursory analysis of the narrative data, we see how those rich and complex data provide plausible, powerful explanations of the results of our quantitative analyses.

Finally, it should be noted that Russian society is not unique in these gender attitudes and their behavioral consequences. In fact, there is reason to believe that this phenomenon is fairly common in study abroad and should be a part of the preparation of both men and women for the experience. Tannen's work on gender differences in conversational style, for instance, suggests that barriers for women in communication are both linguistic/cultural and gender/cultural (Tannen 1990).

## 4. ADDITIONAL ANALYSES

### 4.1. *Audio- and Video-Recorded Data*

At the time of this writing, only the self-report instruments had been transcribed and stored in hypertext for analysis. It still remained to transcribe in their entirety the audio and video recordings of classroom and out-of-classroom encounters, although a sample of the videotapes has been analyzed for insight into the phenomenon of "foreigner talk" (see Gorham 1992). Once transcriptions of these data are completed, we shall have yet another level of data available to integrate with our study of the CDs and narrative data.

Future analyses of these data conducted in conjunction with the project's other data should yield even deeper insights into the themes named above. Some recordings were taken in the classroom or during residence visits; others were of interviews conducted by fieldworkers, which have not yet been integrated into the fieldnotes. Studies of these tapes might compare students' perceptions of their language ability with their performance in various settings; provide more data on how Russian teachers and friends modify their speech (foreigner talk); demonstrate the gender differences suggested in the narrative data; furnish documentation of communication strategies employed by students; or present additional facets of the study-abroad experience that had not surfaced in either the CDs or the narrative data.

### 4.2. *Case Studies*

Once the self-report data and fieldnotes had been stored electronically, an inventory of the data available on each of the study's participants was taken. By using this Student Data Catalog, individual participants for whom we have various modes of data—such as FNs, INs, CDs, NJs/OJs, ATs/VTs, and standardized test scores—can be targeted for case studies. From the multiple modes of data it is possible to provide a detailed, complex account of an individual's experience. For example, in-depth studies of female and male gainers and nongainers may illuminate specific factors that seem to have an impact on language gain across gender lines. Other case studies might examine how individual students describe the role of classes and how they spent their free time (i.e., perhaps students who have few intimate friends feel that classes play a more important role in their language acquisition), or how students at various levels of proficiency describe their language learning (e.g., a contrast of strategies used by students with an initial OPI rating of 1 versus students with an OPI level of 2).[12]

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this paper has been to illustrate how qualitative methodology can be used in the study of second language acquisition. In particular, we described the data collection and methodology of the ACTR/NFLC project and offered preliminary findings, illustrated by sample analyses and data. We

intended to show how qualitative methodology can provide extraordinary insights and detailed documentation of the language-learning process.

The CDs gave us a report on how students spent their time out of class. The narrative data, which capture the voices of students and fieldworkers, contain rich descriptions of the study-abroad experience in the local in-country context. Through these accounts we can distinguish factors that affect language learning on cognitive, affective, cultural, and social levels. Identifying the salient phenomena in the experiences of the participants not only provides a rich description of the specific process of learning Russian during immersion; it also begins to tap into the universal elements of SLA in immersion environments.

The implications for SLA research are multifold. First, this project used both quantitative and qualitative instruments. It was only through employing both types that we were able to break new ground in understanding the SLA process. We found, for instance, that the theme of gender was important. It was from analyses of the ACTR database, the quantitative data, and then the CDs that we discovered differences between the language gains of men and women. However, it is only through the words of the students that we have begun to supply reasons for these differences in concrete and vivid fashion. Thus, in this case, while the difference we found was qualitative, it was an insight that became apparent only after statistical analysis.

Second, the triangulation of the data sources provided an even greater depth of description. While student self-report diaries (NJs/OJs/NBs) alone would have given us a picture of the study-abroad experience, the fieldworkers with their FNs and INs as well as the recordings contribute further pieces to the puzzle of SLA—more pieces than might have been identified from the analysis of a single mode of data. Such data can make case studies more accurate and detailed, enable a closer inspection of taxonomies and systems of language learning and use strategies, and permit identification of specific factors affecting SLA that are impervious to quantitative analysis.

Third and perhaps most important, the qualitative data begin to account for the complexity of the process of SLA during study abroad. In general, examining the actual learning process through the intuitions and reactions of the students themselves begins to provide the terms of reference and to suggest directions for future research on the language acquisition process.

## NOTES

1. Many scholars make a clear distinction between SLA (second language acquisition) and FLL (foreign language learning). The former term is reserved for language learning that takes place in the environment where the target language is the primary vehicle of communication; the latter term denotes cases in which another language (often the native language of the student) is the primary vehicle. This study is based on Americans learning Russian in Russia and so properly falls under the first rubric. Although the issue is significantly complicated by the fact that the students in the present study take formal language classes with their peers in-country, the term SLA will be used here.

2. See DeKeyser 1991 and Freed 1991 and the references cited there, as well as Carlson et al. 1990 and Teichler and Opper 1988 for broader studies that include some discussion of language acquisition during study abroad.

3. The principal investigators of the overall project are Richard Brecht, Dan Davidson, and Ralph Ginsberg. The first, quantitative, phase of the project was supported with funding from ACTR and USDE. Laura Miller was the project officer as well as peer collaborator in the second, Ford Foundation–sponsored, phase of the project, in which the following graduate student research assistants also participated: David Filipov, Elizabeth McKay, Joanna Robin, and Jennifer Robinson. Paul Wheeling organized and managed the ACTR database, as well as providing invaluable assistance in the analysis of all phases of the project.

4. For explication of the results from Phase I, see Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg 1990, 1991; Brecht and Davidson 1992; and Ginsberg 1992.

5. See Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg 1993 for a discussion of these results.

6. The only exception was the final semester of data collection, which occurred during the summer. Academic-year and summer program data are available and will be reported on separately.

7. For instance, the situation of "on the town" might be divided into the following events, speech acts, and topics:

situation: on the town
event: transportation
event: conversation
speech act: arguing
topic: politics
topic: boy-girl
speech act: joking
topic: foreign accent
topic: money

8. To keep the designation of "situation" distinct from "event," the "macro-events," like all the events, bear the appellation of the student filling out the CD. When equated with the situation, they receive one of the situation names.

9. See Oxford and Crookall 1989 for a review of research conducted on learning strategies in SLA.

10. See Nyikos and Oxford 1993 for a recent study of self-reported learning-strategy use among undergraduate foreign language students and the influence of the social context on shaping learner behaviors in language learning.

11. See Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg 1990, 1991.

12. Within the project, some work on this topic has been done by Korkoreva 1993.

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